

Ten Things I Know About the Wizard

by Steve Rasnic Tem



One: That He Has a Beautiful Daughter

Clarence first met Amanda in the marketplace when she stole several fruits from his vending cart. He'd been completely entranced by her: her long, silky black hair falling loosely to her shoulders, her narrow face and full lips. And her eyes, like emeralds on snow. He was watching those eyes when he should have been watching her hands. It was only as she started to turn away that he saw her slipping the fruit into the front pockets of her dress.

He stood in complete bewilderment a moment—by her clothes she'd seemed well off—before jumping over the side of his cart and bounding after her, heedless of the fruit being spilled and retrieved by eager passersby behind him.

The girl was fast, and Clarence had a

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difficult time of it just keeping her fleeting form in sight. She seemed to know well the lanes and back alleys—surprising for someone of her bearing—and it took all of Clarence's experience not to become lost himself.

But finally she made a wrong turn, and Clarence found himself face to face with the beautiful maiden, her back to a dead end. He had her! But she smiled much too engagingly, he thought, for a thief caught in the act.

He stared at her for some time; she examined him with those emerald eyes just as intently. Clarence knew how to handle the ordinary thief; he had a great deal of experience in the marketplace. But he had no idea how he should speak to a lady, even if she were a thief.

"You took my fruit!" he finally blurted out.

She merely smiled and nodded.

"You didn't pay!"

She laughed out loud.

"But why?" he asked.

"Why . . . I was hungry," she replied in a soft and musical voice.

Two: That He Has a Very Unusual Daughter

Clarence spent the following weeks with the maiden, whose name was Amanda, in considerable mental and emotional confusion. He was never quite sure what she was thinking, or what she meant by some of her bizarre statements.

"Where do you come from?" he would ask her.

"Past the moon and beneath the tavern floor," she would reply.

Such nonsense . . . but he found her utterly fascinating. He couldn't



control himself. He couldn't stay away from her.

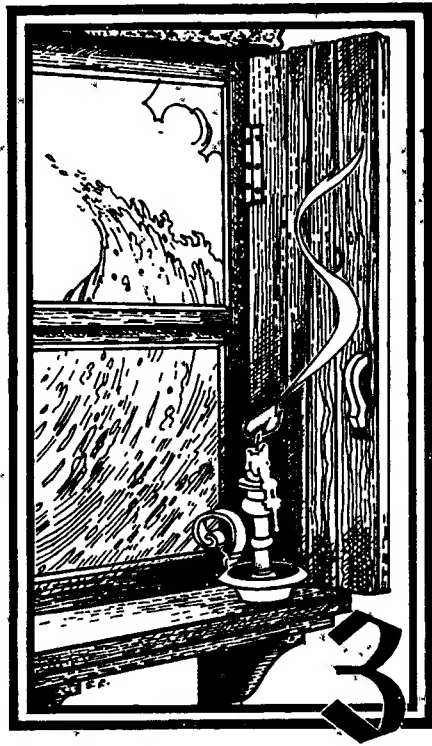
More than once he had to stop her from stealing something from a local shop. She didn't really need to do such things; she simply enjoyed the challenge, she had told him. But still she persisted, and more than once they had some close calls together. Many of the local merchants were quite capable of handling their affairs without benefit of law. Clarence found himself constantly afflicted with aches and pains acquired during Amanda's escapades.

She was prone to marked swings in mood. One moment she might be laughing with him and the next screaming. He could never predict how she was going to react to anything he said. So any indication of a mood shift made him anxious.

It soon became obvious to him that

Amanda had grown fond of him as well. Even though she complained about his inability to talk back to her, to be more forceful, she wanted to spend most of her time with him, she said. And despite her strange ways, he felt the same. "But my father is a wizard," she told him. "And you must meet him first, and impress him if we are to marry. That may prove difficult, Clarence my love. He is a strange man, but he's of course responsible for my existence." She laughed.

Clarence didn't know quite what to say.



Three: That He Lives in a Dark, Secluded House by the Sea

Clarence could not fathom the materials the wizard used to build his house; they seemed to be an amalgam of contradictory substances. The house was part of a granite cliff, with trees and other vegetation so mixed in that they appeared to be part of the structure itself. A large cypress melded into the roof line. A boulder formed the central portion of one of the countless chimneys. Clay and steel and cement supported one of the outside walls. There were circular doors, rectangular doors, and triangular doors. Vines

covered some oddly-shaped windows and uncovered others. Strange animals nested in the oddly-angled nooks and crannies. The lines of perspective appeared contradictory.

And one section of the house seemed impossibly dark, even in the morning light, as if that section of the house had been fashioned of night itself.

It had taken them two days' journey to get there, and Clarence had wondered the entire time why it was worth the effort. Amanda complained about her father constantly: how he attempted to control her life, how he had adamant opinions on most any subject, how he inflicted "silent rages" upon anyone who dared disagree with him.

But when Clarence had questioned their going, Amanda had lashed out at him with unexpected viciousness. "Because he's my father!" she had cried. "It's for me to decide whether to visit him or not!"

So they'd made the trip, through wastelands and mysterious, dream-like landscapes Clarence had never known existed. The wizard was indeed isolated; there seemed to be no other dwellings as far as the eye could see. Clarence couldn't understand why anyone would even want to live out there.

"You grew up in this place?" Clarence asked as they stood below the wizard's cliff-dwelling.

"I did. . . ." Amanda said quietly.

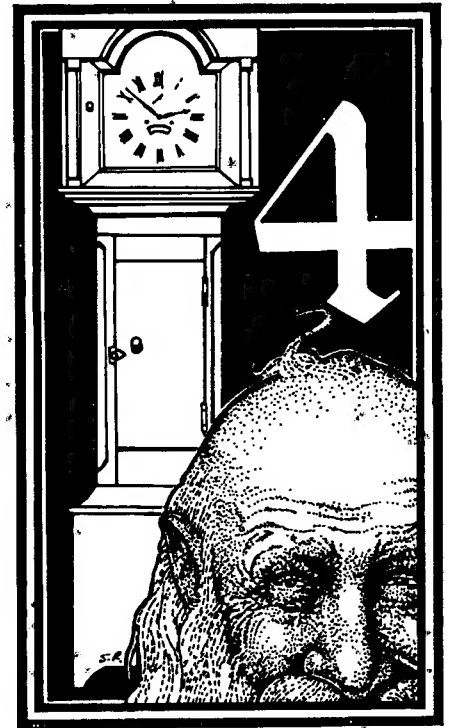
"I don't understand. Who were your friends? Who did you play with as a child?"

She turned to him with a slight frown. "I didn't have any friends," she said flatly. "Any companions I had my father made for me out of dust and swampwater."

With that, she turned and guided him to the steep staircase climbing the cliffside to the wizard's house.

Four: That He Is Very Old

The wizard sat behind an immense table piled high with books. He was difficult to see behind the dusty volumes: only a purple-sleeved arm at the



side now and then, white and fish-like hands, or the top of his head, nearly bald and intricately veined.

"Father. . ." Amanda said with a nervous edge to her voice.

There was no answer.

"Father, I've come home to visit. I've brought a friend."

Clarence heard a chair scrape, a dry cough, and then a small, wizened figure crept around from behind the table. Clarence relaxed a bit at the wizard's appearance: he seemed to be only five feet tall or so, and quite frail. Who could fear a man like that?

But the wizard suddenly straightened up, his back unbending, shoulders broadening, head pulling erect so that he was quickly over six feet in height and fixing Clarence with large, bloodshot eyes.

Clarence stepped back and allowed Amanda to approach her father.

"This is Clarence, father. My friend."

The wizard stepped forward out of the dim light so that Clarence was able to see his features more clearly. His skin was so white it appeared to be luminous, his bald head like an oval of light. What little hair he had was white and cropped closely, making a band above his ears. He also had a short white beard which covered his chin. His



eyes seemed terribly mobile in contrast to the rest of his features. His mouth was a rigid line. Although his features did not in and of themselves seem ancient, his entire aspect was one of incredible age. Clarence sensed that the wizard was the oldest creature he had ever met.

The wizard did not speak to Clarence.

"It has been a long time between visits, Amanda," the wizard said to his daughter.

"I . . . I've been away." For the first time, Clarence saw Amanda avert her eyes in embarrassment. He had never thought before that she could feel such a thing.

There was an awkward silence during which Amanda seemed to be struggling to find something to say. Her father waited impatiently.

"How has your health been?" she finally asked.

"Well enough," he said. Then, "You may spend a few days here, Amanda, but I have my work and will need solitude thereafter." He turned and left.

Amanda stood there quietly, and Clarence could not approach her.

Five: That He Is a Shape-Shifter

That first day in the wizard's house

proved to be a long one for Clarence. Amanda was sullen and irritable with him much of the time, and the wizard seemed to be ignoring them.

But when he had questioned Amanda about her father's absence, she had lashed out at him. "Open your eyes, can't you! He's watching us both constantly! He doesn't even make an effort to hide it!"

Clarence looked around uneasily. "I . . . don't see . . ."

"Look! There he is now!" she cried, pointing to a corner of the room.

Clarence looked where she had pointed, but saw nothing but an untidy pile of clutter. "Where? I don't see him."

"The mouse! The mouse, you fool."

Clarence stared. There was a mouse there, a small gray one. It wrinkled its nose at the two of them, then scurried into a small hole in the debris.

"Your father?"

"Of course. . . ."

Six: That He Is Not Really Bad, Just Arrogant

Clarence saw many other animals, and one time a small dwarf with an immense red nose, all of whom seemed to observe him with a bit too much intensity, a bit too much interest for normal creatures of that type. He began to feel watched constantly. Amanda told him there were no pests or animals of any type in residence at the house normally—the wizard used a charm to keep them away—so any other creatures or personages found there were the wizard himself. Clarence encountered a cat, a dog, a small wren, a caterpillar, a spider, a cricket, and a moose (which he was startled to discover in his bedroom one evening) in just his first two days in the wizard's home. He became particularly careful of his actions when he was around Amanda.

This angered Amanda greatly, and twice she pulled Clarence close for an embrace when one of these creatures was in the room. Clarence sputtered and tried to pull away, a nervous eye on the creature.

"Coward!" Amanda screamed. She began hitting Clarence across the chest. "Spineless idiot!"

But the rest of the time she was distant, preoccupied. She seemed to want to have little to do with Clarence.

The wizard did not do anything which might have been called bad; even Amanda's many complaints about her father did not seem to add up to the evil man Clarence had first visualized. The wizard was merely headstrong and arrogant; he was daily exposed to the temptation of great power, and obviously he often gave in



to it. He enjoyed using power, and used it extensively. Who could really blame him for that?

"So many . . . like my father . . . they start thinking they're gods in their old age," Amanda had said to him. But as far as he could tell, the wizard had not gone that far.

One of the wizard's most disturbing amusements was his habit of producing ghosts from the past, either replicas of Amanda's childhood companions he'd manufactured previously, or figures from Clarence's own childhood. Clarence felt as if he were constantly dreaming, confronted daily by his long-dead parents, the pet lizards he'd once

owned, his long-dead sister's three-year-old self, and assorted young friends mostly long-forgotten.

Amanda's "ghosts" were a bit more exotic. A giant spider with bright red eyes and eighteen legs. A large, fat, jelly-like creature with one thick leg. Two sets of siamese twins. A large bird with a bell around its neck. And a few a bit more disturbing: a hideous, deformed head that talked, a small subhuman which bled from its ears constantly and impossibly, and a furry creature which screamed piteously in constant pain.

Amanda was on edge, her eyes darting, her hands dry and raw from rubbing them together. Clarence could not understand why the wizard, whom neither had seen for more than a few minutes in his true form, would do this to his own daughter. What was he thinking of?



Seven: That He Has a Separable Soul

Clarence discovered that after several days he was growing increasingly angry with both Amanda and her father. The wizard was needling him almost constantly, sending all manner of apparitions into his room to disturb him. And the wizard's presence was almost constant. Many times Clarence did not

know whether a particular presence was the wizard in disguise or one of his manufactures.

So, surprisingly, he found himself talking back to Amanda with more fervor, not letting any of her small jibes past him.

He had actually expected she would like him better that way, of course. But that wasn't her reaction.

"You're getting to be just like him!" she screamed at Clarence. "You have an opinion about everything, and you think you're the only one who knows the truth!"

One day, Clarence and Amanda sneaked into the wizard's study when they knew he was out in the woods. It was unusual for him to be away. He spent hours here, working long into the night with little or no sleep. The study was an immense, drafty chamber, filled with books, manuscripts, odd statues and carvings, jars full of substances, preserved animals, and all sorts of mechanical instruments. Clarence did not like the place and wanted to leave, but Amanda wouldn't permit it.

"I think he's keeping some important secrets from us; I want to find them."

She began to rummage through all the strange articles. Clarence, stood watching nervously. Then he heard a bird cackle, and jumped. He sought the source of the sound in the darkness.

"It's only Janalai," she said, chuckling. When Clarence still looked puzzled, Amanda grabbed him by the hand and pulled him into one of the corners. She lit a small candle and a yellow glow illuminated the objects there.

A bird sat in its nest atop several old barrels and large books. The column looked unstable, but the bird seemed content enough. It had a long neck and a bright green head. Ragged purple feathers protruded from its sides helter-skelter, looking as if the bird had been in a serious accident.

Amanda walked over to the bird, clutched its neck, and pulled it roughly out of its nest. A silver egg lay within.

"See," Amanda gestured with her other hand, "Janalai guards my father's



soul."

"His soul?"

"Many wizards are able to remove their souls," Amanda said. "They hide it somewhere, as in this egg. You can't destroy a wizard until you find the hiding place of his soul, actually. It makes them almost indestructible."

"But why does he leave it in such an open area? Someone could come in here and steal it!"

"He moves it to another hiding place periodically, although there has been no need of late to do so. No one comes here anymore. My father is not an active enough opponent for anyone to want to kill."

Clarence looked again at the egg and shuddered, imagining it falling to the hard rock floor.

Eight: That He Is in Complete Control

On the fifth day, Clarence discovered he could not leave the wizard's house. He'd simply wanted some fresh air, then found that there were no more doors to the outside, and that all the windows were bolted. When he went to Amanda to tell her about this, she shrugged. "So, what did you expect?" she said.

As a child, Amanda had once told him, she'd thought her father could do

anything. He'd always seemed to know what she was thinking. And when she'd misbehaved, she'd believed that he had paralyzed her because she'd been unable to move with the consequent fear. He knew what was right and wrong, and had the power of life and death over her. He was in complete control.

There was no escaping him.



Nine: That He Has a Test for Me

On his last day at the wizard's house, Clarence woke up on the floor of a great dark hallway, a place he had never seen before. He stood up and began to walk down the length of the hall when the walls started to shift, sending him

About the Author

STEVE RASNIC TEM will have many different projects appearing in the near future. His sf poetry anthology is out, and is getting good reviews. He'll have science fiction appearing in *Asimov's*, fantasy appearing in *Elsewhere Vol. 3* and the British anthology *Lands of Never*, and horror appearing in *The Last Dangerous Visions*, and *Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine*.

scrambling madly to avoid being crushed by the moving stone.

He found himself in a small room with the walls slowly closing in on him. He had to move the heavy table around quickly so as to wedge the walls apart.

Suddenly the floor dropped out from under him and he found himself on the table and sliding down an immense stone ramp where the floor used to be. He had to leap off before the table smashed into a wall at the bottom of the ramp.

Then all the creatures he'd met from Amanda's past began chasing him, and no matter how fast he ran he seemed to get no farther away from them.

Suddenly he was in the same long corridor he began in, but the walls were lined with pictures now, and as a floating ball of light descended by each one he was able to examine them. They seemed to be several pictures of Amanda, a picture of the wizard, and one of another woman whom Clarence had never seen before.

Ten: That a Wizard's Daughter Is Hard to Love

The wizard was suddenly at his side, seeming impossibly tall. "My wife . . ." the wizard said, gesturing toward the picture of the unknown woman.

"My mother . . ." he said, pointing toward one of the pictures Clarence had thought to be of Amanda. Clarence started to protest involuntarily, but was able to control himself.

"Amanda . . ." the wizard said, pointing to the next picture, ". . . and her sisters. . ." He swept his arm across the length of the hall, and the descending lights illuminated countless other portraits, all looking exactly like Amanda's.

The wizard turned to him. "I never knew my mother; my father was a great magician who took her away from me. But still she did not have to go; she did not have to leave me. Each time I have lost Amanda, one such as you has brought her back to me. I keep remaking her, her companions, and yet she is ungrateful . . . still she leaves me . . ."

Clarence ran through the hallway, through the doors, up winding staircases. The wizard put nothing more in his way. Clarence did not slow down until he reached Amanda's door.

He heard her crying within. He opened the door slowly.

Amanda was playing with her companions: the small subhuman bleeding, the little furry thing crying, the deformed bodiless head talking with maddening animation.

Amanda was beginning to fade, as her companions were beginning to fade. Somehow she looked older even as she began to disappear, but Clarence



could not be sure. He remembered what she'd said so long ago: "He is of course responsible for my existence . . ."

And then she was gone completely. A gray mouse scurried out from under the bed, staring at Clarence as it wiggled its nose. Then it became a ferocious-looking silver cat that ran out the door screeching.

Clarence knew that Amanda would soon be appearing in the room again, a new and different Amanda for the wizard to love.

But he did not wait.

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